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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000973

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SECURITY STILL MAIN CONCERN FOR SUNNI LEADERS

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a March 21 meeting with Codel Warner, Tawaffuq leaders Tarik Hashimi and Ayad Samarai decried sectarian violence and claimed that the Sunnis bear the brunt of it. Calling the current distribution of power in Iraq unbalanced, and blaming the US for that imbalance, the Sunnis asked for US intervention in government formation talks and in investigating human rights abuses linked to Iraqi government security services. They demanded the disarming of militias and complained about US inaction on Iran's meddling in Iraqi affairs. Iranian agents are interfering in government formation talks, charged Hashimi, and all the political groups have been told to support Jafari for the PM slot or chaos will continue in Iraq and will extend to the Kurdish region. End Summary

Iraq is in a Civil War Says Hashimi  
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¶2. (C) Tarik Hashimi told the Senators that no one has the courage to say so, but based on the number of deaths, especially after the December 15 election, Iraq is in a civil war. Both sides are suffering said Hashimi, but it is mostly Sunnis who are being killed. Al-Qai'da is targeting Shia to ferment sectarian backlash. Families, both Sunni and Shia, are being displaced and Shia fear travel to the north while Sunnis fear traveling to the south. Noting that the Sunnis are participating in the political process and voted in large numbers in the December parliamentary elections, Hashimi wondered who had an interest in increased sectarian violence.

Power Imbalance Must be Corrected  
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¶3. (C) The power imbalance was created by the Coalition after April 2003 when the Sunnis were marginalized and blamed for all of Iraq's ills, said Hashimi. The Sunnis now want to get beyond sectarianism and talk about Iraq, whereas the Shia, in Hashimi's view, still want to dominate the political process. The Shia control government and have militias and wish to maintain both advantages. Sunni Arabs will not accept Shia militias acting with government support, said Samarai.

Iranian Influence Harmful  
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¶4. (C) Ayad Samarai said that the US underestimated the negative impact of Iran in Iraq. Inadequate border security enabled the Iranians to infiltrate

people into Iraq easily. Now Iranian agents are everywhere and their influence is felt on Iraqi political life at every level, said Samarrai. Hashimi, in agreement, stated that even in the current government formation talks, Iranian agents are directly influencing actions of all the political parties, not just the Shia. Hashimi claimed that the Shia, Kurds and the Sunnis were all approached by Iranian delegations who told them to support Jafari's candidacy for PM or chaos in Iraq would continue. Kurds were specifically warned that Kurdistan will also be affected, claimed Hashimi.

#### A Sunni View of How to Restore Security

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15. (C) Hashimi cautioned that while he would not publicly urge that Coalition Forces stay longer in Iraq, the US is responsible for security in Iraq and cannot leave until that is assured. Hashimi said he liked President Bush's statement that troops will stay until security is assured even though they want the Coalition out of Iraq as soon as possible. The militias must be disarmed, he added. The Sadr militia's coordinated attacks on Sunni Arab civilians and mosques after the Samarra incident showed that it is now an army, he claimed. Hashimi added that it was obvious that American forces were not patrolling in Sadr City despite the obvious presence of the Jaysh al-Mahdi. (He pointed to the contrast of steady American operations in nearby al-Adhamiyah.) He cautioned that the Americans are giving the appearance of weakness and an unwillingness to fight that makes the Mahdi army look stronger and act more boldly.

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16. (C) Hashimi also charged that the Iraqi government cannot be trusted to investigate charges of MOI abuses. Only the US could do this fairly. He urged that we move forward with the Jadriyah bunker investigation and announce whatever results there were publicly. In sum, he concluded that the U.S. must

- stop MOI abuses;
- investigate prior abuses credibly, and
- ensure that the security portfolios go to non-sectarian nominees with no ties to the militias.

Only with these changes, and a truly national unity government, would the US be able to provide the security that will allow for a withdrawal of US troops, Hashimi told the delegation.

#### Comment

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17. (C) This was standard fare from one of Iraq's key Sunni Arab political leaders, and one of its most outspoken. It is noticeable, however, that in the wake of the Samarra bombing, Hashimi was not insisting on a timetable for withdrawal of Coalition Forces. Instead, he was urging - behind closed doors - that we not depart too quickly. His frustration with the silence about the Jadriyah bunker is a common theme we hear from the Iraqi Islamic Party and other Sunni Arabs. His pointed remark that the Sunni Arabs perceive that the Americans look reluctant to confront Shia militias is also a jab we are hearing from other Sunni Arab contacts (who want us to squash the Mahdi militia (you refer to JAM four different ways in this cable: "Sadr's militia", "Jaysh al-Mahdi", the "Mahdi army", and "the Mahdi militia". I recommend you refer to it the same way throughout, or provide a bit more context for readers who might not be attuned to this issue)). Other Iraqis are observing the same American

behavior in Sadr City and some are probably drawing the same conclusions that Hashimi drew even if they are not saying it.

18. (U) Codel Warner did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

KHALILZAD